FL♡URISHING

12.8K

ꭒNLINE

1.6K

A musician's guide to healthy social media use

Dr. Marc S Tibber | Dr. Emma Silver | Dr. George Musgrave

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

UCL

INTRODUCTION

Finding your balance in the digital age

For musicians today, social media is not just a promotional tool – it is a central part of your career. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok let you reach audiences directly, share your work instantly, and build your artistic identity outside traditional industry gatekeepers such as major record labels and national broadcasters. But along with opportunity comes pressure: artists now face demands for constant visibility and engagement, which can blur personal boundaries and affect mental health.

A recent research study[1] drawing on interviews with UK-based career musicians highlights this tension. Musicians agree that being online is essential for professional success, but many feel uncertain about how it shapes their personal wellbeing and artistic values. This booklet summarises the latest research, common experiences, and practical tips to help you thrive – not just survive – on social media.

1: Musgrave, Carney, Silver & Tibber, 2025

Social media and mental health in musicians: what do we know?

The Double-Edged Sword: Career musicians are at higher risk of mental health difficulties than the general population, with increased rates of stress, anxiety, depression and suicide. Some of this is linked to traditional industry pressures, but many artists now identify social media as a new, complex source of both support and strain.

The potential benefits of social media for musicians include:

- Building supportive communities and networks.

- Opportunities for self-expression and creative experimentation.

- Direct engagement with fans, career advancement, and inspiration from peers.

- Political activism and connecting around shared identities and causes.

However, the risks to mental health are significant:

- **Upward social comparison**
  Constantly seeing the heavily curated successes of others may trigger self-doubt and lower self-esteem.

- **Trolling, abuse, and harassment**
  Especially for women, people of colour and other minoritised identities.

- **Pressure to share more**
  Feeling compelled to make every aspect of life 'content', even when it intrudes on creativity or personal time.

- **Algorithmic uncertainty**
  Not knowing what will 'work' or be rewarded can fuel anxiety over career control.

- **Blurred boundaries**
  Difficulty separating personal and professional, public and private selves online and offline.

- **Displacement of valued activities**
  Time spent on content creation and engagement can come at the cost of music-making or relationships.

Research shows there is no single experience of social media – much depends on why and how you engage with the technology, as well as your unique strengths and vulnerabilities.

Social media is a tool: it can support your wellbeing when used with intention, but it may cause harm if usage becomes compulsive, (unhelpfully) comparative, or disconnected from your core values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Managing social media for professional, personal,
and artistic flourishing

Here are some practical ways to use social media constructively, based on existing research and musicians' lived experiences:

1. CLARIFY YOUR VALUES

- Align your online presence with your true priorities – whether that's artistic growth, connection, activism, or career-building, not just 'likes' or follower counts.
  How can you do this? Some steps to try:

  a. Reflect on what makes music, and life more generally, meaningful for you, and use social media as a tool for those aims.

  b. Clarify what you are – and are not – willing to compromise in the interests of your career progression.

  c. Try to avoid basing your self-worth on online metrics; your value is more than the number of streams or number of likes on a post.

  d. Remember what brought you to making music in the first place; perhaps the joy of creativity or sharing your work with others.

2. PRACTICE MINDFUL AND PURPOSEFUL ENGAGEMENT

- Be intentional: Set times for social media use instead of drifting into 'doom-scrolling'. Consider planning content ahead to avoid last-minute stress.

- Notice how you feel both during and after using social media. Perhaps keep notes of the impact it has. Change what you do if you notice that you feel worse, anxious, or disconnected.

- Recognise the 'algorithmic pull' of features designed to hook your attention. Take breaks and use available controls: deactivate notifications, and ask someone to check in on you if they notice you are scrolling for long periods.

- Use the technology rather than be used by it: shape your use to take advantage of platforms and features that support you and your values rather than undermine them.

- Remember that there are thousands of musicians using social media, and research suggests many of them will be feeling similarly to you. You are not alone in feeling, at times, frustrated, exhausted or overwhelmed.

- Clarify the things you *can* control, and the things you *cannot*. For example, you *can* control the music you make, the posts you write and how you use social media; you *cannot* control the algorithm, or how others will view you.

3. SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

- Decide which aspects of your personal life you want to share and stick to it. Resist pressure to reveal more and more.

- Separate personal and professional accounts if that helps you manage overlap and emotional load.

- Take regular digital breaks – periods 'offline' can restore your creativity and broaden your perspective.

- Turn off DMs if these become overwhelming, and don't be afraid to block or de-friend.

- Monitor and manage your time online so it doesn't displace music-making or important relationships.

4. MANAGE SOCIAL COMPARISON

- Comparing *your* inside to *their* outside: Remember that most online profiles are curated and idealised – including those of other musicians.

- Avoid constant monitoring of your 'performance' in relation to others.

- Seek inspiration, not just competition: use comparisons sparingly, focusing on particular areas to learn, or gain inspiration, from.

- Cultivate a broad and stable sense of self-worth, rooted in your values and lived experience, not just your online persona. Remind yourself of people and things that are important to you *outside* of the industry.

5. FIND YOUR COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT

- Connect with others who share your experiences and struggles – both online and offline.

- Reach out for professional support if needed. Mental health matters, and resources exist for musicians.

- Collaborate with others, lift up peers, and celebrate community wins to counter feelings of isolation. Research shows celebrating and supporting others online is linked to improved wellbeing.

6. TAILOR YOUR APPROACH TO YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS

- Target what works: not everyone needs to use every platform or post constantly to succeed. Genre, career stage, and personality all matter – find what fits for you.

- Early-career or less commercial musicians may have different pressures – don't measure yourself by one 'industry standard' or another musician's trajectory.

- Remember too, many suggest that it is not *reach* that matters for career development online, i.e. reaching as many listeners as possible, but creating deep and meaningful engagement with a smaller number of listeners.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Online safety

Helplines Supporting Adults & Young People
swgfl.org.uk/helplines

Report Harmful Content
reportharmfulcontent.com

Musicians' mental health

Mental health support resources from the Musicians' Union
musiciansunion.org.uk/health-safety-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing/
mental-health-support

Find out more

To find out more about the research described in this pamphlet, please see:
Musgrave, Carney, Silver & Tibber (2025) 'Working in the content factory': Musicians' social media use and mental health as seen through the lens of a transdiagnostic cognitive behavioural conceptualisation, Frontiers in Psychology, 16:1542407, pp. 1-16.

This research was undertaken in collaboration between University College London (UCL) and Goldsmiths, University of London. Funding for both the research and this guide was provided by Goldsmiths, University of London.

In a world where being 'seen' often feels like a requirement, remember that your music – and your health – matter most. Approach social media on your own terms, stay grounded in your values, and set boundaries that allow you to flourish, both online and offline.

Contact details

Dr. Marc S Tibber
m.tibber@ucl.ac.uk

Dr. Emma Silver
e.silver@ucl.ac.uk

Dr. George Musgrave
G.Musgrave@gold.ac.uk

Design
We Made This

Image credits
Page 2: Fikry Anshor
Page 5: Isaac Ibbott | Ilias Chebb
Page 6: Soundtrap | Chad Madden
Page 7: Edward Eyer | Kate Trifo